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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to group students for reading instruction. The paper first considers the reasons for heterogeneous grouping, where there are mixed levels of reading achievement among the students in the classroom. It then discusses some weaknesses in advocating heterogeneous grouping. There are individualized plans for reading instruction which do not matter if heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping is used in the classroom, such as personalized reading and programmed reading. It also includes basal reader use in that category. The paper stresses that a forward-looking reading program moves from where a student is presently achieving to some more ideal level of achievement. It cites several things to look out for in the reading curriculum so that students can achieve optimally. (Contains 11 references.) (NKA)

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Homogeneous Grouping and Heterogeneous Grouping.

by Marlow Ediger

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HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING AN HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING

There is much debate about how to group students for reading instruction. In educational literature. Seemingly most writers stress the importance of heterogeneous grouping. Thus, there are mixed reading achievement levels of students in the classroom. Advocates here believe that students

1. are not segregated by ability levels. Segregation is an awful thing to experience. The tendency may have been to use negative names for learners in a lower ability group such as the sparrows or starlings. However, being in a higher achievement reading group called the cardinals or the blue jays indicated status. The author believes most teachers would not be so unwise as to use discriminatory names for reading groups.
2. can learn from each other in heterogeneous reading groups. Slower achievers can learn from the more rapid achievers in reading and vice versa.
3. should all experience the more sophisticated knowledge and skills needed to be successful in society. Generally, the more talented and gifted receive the more sophisticated knowledge and skills in homogenous grouping. Thus, the slower readers are held back from doing as well as possible in reading.
4. should all receive instruction from the best qualified teachers of reading. In homogeneous grouping, the talented readers receive more of high quality instruction as compared to slower learners.
5. should not experience a watered down reading curriculum as very often has been the case in homogeneous grouping of slower students in reading instruction (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Seventeen).

Weaknesses in advocating heterogeneous grouping of students for reading instruction include the following:

1. the arguments made for heterogeneous grouping favor slower achievers in reading instruction. Little is said as to what would help gifted readers to improve in achievement.
2. it is more difficult to teach a mixed achievement level of learners as compared to a more uniform set of achievers. The range of achievement then makes for increased problems in providing for individual differences.
3. the gifted and talented also need to be provided for adequately so that equality of opportunity is there for all students in ongoing reading instruction.
4. slower achievers may feel inferior as compared to those achieving at a higher level when being taught in the same classroom.
5. it becomes easier to identify and ridicule slow achievers in a

heterogeneously grouped classroom (See Ediger, 2001, 121-122).

. There are plans of reading instruction which do not matter if homogenous or heterogeneous grouping is used in the classroom. These plans will now be discussed.

Individualized Reading in the Classroom

Personalized reading, as a first approach in individualized reading to be discussed, emphasizes students individually selecting sequential library books to read. The individual selects a library book to read regardless of his/her talents in reading achievement. He/she chooses a book of interest, from among others. Interest is a leading factor in making the decision. In addition to interest factors, the library book selected needs ot be on his/her reading level so that quality comprehension is in evidence. A conference with the teacher follows the reading of each library book to assess comprehension on different levels of cognition. A short selection, chosen by the student, is read aloud to check reading fluency and word identification skills.

Personalized reading emphasizes a whole language approach in reading. Phonics instruction does not interrupt the securing of ideas when reading silently. Bits of phonics may be stressed during the individualized conference with the classroom reading teacher. In personalized reading, each student basically is

1. reading from a different library book.
2. a conference is held one on one between the teacher and the student, following the completion of reading the self selected library book.
3. the student cannot compare himself/herself with others in classroom reading achievement, but makes comparison with previous achievement, as written down by the teacher following each dated conference.
4. there are no groups in personalized reading unless the teacher wishes to teach selected facets of phonics or comprehension to students. This may be done in heterogeneous or homogeneous groupings of students.

A second approach in individualizing instruction is programmed reading. The programmer is the key person in writing these reading materials. He/she determines the objectives, the learning activities to achieve the objectives, as well as determines the assessment procedures. Programmed materials can be teacher proof in their development and use. Be it a programmed textbook or computer form, the program follows a selected sequence. First, the reader reads a short passage, responds to a multiple choice test item, and immediately sees in the textbook or on the monitor if the answer was correct. He/she then receives feedback as to

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the correctness or lack thereof pertaining to the response given. The reader is then ready for the next sequential short passage to read, respond to a multiple choice test item, and notice the correctness or incorrectness of his/her response given. The same sequence is followed again and again of read, respond, and check. Major facets of a programed set of reading materials are the following:

1. they are entirely developed by the programmer with no teacher or student input.
2. they possess a tightly knit sequence whereby the student should obtain 90 - 95% correctness of responses in pilot tested programmed materials of instruction.
3. they have everything needed within the programs for reading instruction in textbook or software form.
4. they have students read small bit of information followed by testing and feedback. In this way a student will not be practicing the wrong thing. He/she can see the correct response before reading the next sequential short passage.
5. they do not emphasize grouping of students for instruction and so the heterogeneous/homogeneous problem in grouping is no issue here (See Ediger, 1984, 240-243).

Basal Textbook Use

Basal texts have been used for approximately 150 years. They need to be carefully selected based on the best criteria possible. Each series of textbooks has a related manual for the teacher to use in teaching reading. The manual contains suggestions on objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures. Thus, the teacher may select, from among alternatives, as to what to use from the teacher's manual. There are no dictated rules here. The reading teacher may use either heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping when teaching the classroom of students as a whole. When small group or committees are taught, the groups may also be heterogeneous or homogenous groupings. There can also be individual study and projects whereby ability grouping or lack thereof presents no problems in the dilemma.

Basal readers are neither good nor bad in their total makeup, but how they are used by the teacher to provide for individual differences is paramount. Basals cannot

1. automatically provide for individual differences, but a good, well trained teacher may do a good job of helping each student to achieve as optimally as possible with flexible plans of grouping for instruction
2. dictate which plan oof grouping to use. The teacher needs to be ingenious by planning how to assist optimal student achievement within the process of grouping for instruction.
3. determine how much time to give to large group instruction,

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committee work, and individual endeavors. Mixed achievement levels or uniformity of individuals within a group is also decided upon by the reading teacher.

4. make decisions on criteria to use in grouping students for reading instruction.

5. cannot solve the debate on heterogeneous versus homogeneous grouping in teaching reading (See Ediger, 1979-1980, 26-28).

How students are to be grouped will depend upon many factors involved in helping each learner do as well as possible in reading, including

1. personal interest possessed in the story being discussed.
2. learning style possessed be it intrapersonal or interpersonal (See Searson and Dunn, 2001).
3. individual or multiple intelligences possessed to reveal what has been learned (Gardner, 1993). The intelligences(s) possessed may be used in grouping for instruction.
4. school administrative support for any single plan of grouping/instruction (Ediger, 1986 -1987, 8-11).
5. parental and lay public support for selected grouping procedures (See Ediger, 1978, 37-39).

To work for change in grouping students for instruction, the teacher needs to work effectively with all constituents, be it in school and in society. Educating others in what makes for quality grouping procedures is a must. Diverse media need to be used in the process. Innovative grouping practices should mean better achievement for each learner in the reading curriculum.

A Forward Looking Reading Program

A Forward looking reading program moves from where a student is presently achieving to some more ideal level of attainment. Optimal achievement is desired for each learner in reading growth. Thus, the reading curriculum should guide each student to begin where he/she is presently in achievement. A variety of assessment instruments should be used to evaluate/determine the present status of the student's reading achievement. Second, good sequence must be emphasized with appropriate learning opportunities in an individualized/group reading program which guides each student to achieve continuously. Third, the learning opportunities must capture learner interest, meaning, and purpose. Fourth, students develop appropriate appreciations toward reading and its contributions to school and life, in society. Fifth, growth in student reading processes and achievement needs to be continuous and

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ongoing. Sixth, inservice education for teachers is necessary to stay abreast of research, literature, and recommendations in the teaching of reading. Seventh, multiple intelligences need to be used in the assessment process to ascertain learner achievement and progress in reading. Eighth, with high stakes testing using state mandated tests, more is expected of the student than ever before, especially in the reading curriculum. It behooves the teacher to do an extremely superb job of teaching students (See Education Week, April 18, 2001). Ninth, there are a plethora of variables to consider when grouping students for instruction in the teaching of reading. Tenth, the feelings and emotions of students do need prime consideration when grouping students for instruction (See Goleman, 1995)..

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